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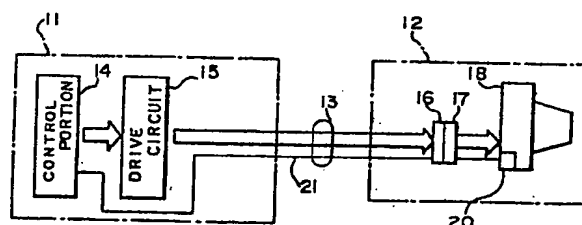
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The title of the invention has been amended (Guidelines for Examination in the EPO, A-III, 7.3).
A request for correction and addition of the originally filed description has been filed pursuant to Rule 88 EPC. A decision on the request will be taken during the proceedings before the Examining Division (Guidelines for Examination in the EPO, A-V, 2.2).

64 Serial printer control.

57 A printer includes a print head (18) carrying identifications means (20) operable to identify the type of print head (18) currently loaded on a carriage portion (12) for printing characters on a print paper. Head connectors (16; 17) are disposed on the carriage portion (12) to enable a plurality of different types of print heads to be connected commonly with a drive circuit (15) and a control portion (14). The control portion (14) is operative to identify the type of the currently loaded print head on the basis of the content of the identification means, and also to perform controlling of the drive circuit (15) under certain controlling conditions corresponding to the type of the thus-identified print head.

FIG. 1



EP 0 274 435 A2

Description

"PRINTER"

The present invention relates to printers such as serial printers, and more particularly to the control of such printers.

Known serial printers include a print head for printing characters on a print form or paper, a carriage portion for loading thereon the print head, a space motor for moving the carriage portion, a line feed motor for feeding the print form, and a control unit for controlling the operation of the aforesaid component parts. The control unit is connected with the space motor, the line feed motor and the print head via connecting cords. A typical example of such known serial printers will be described below with reference to Figures 6 to 8 of the accompanying drawings.

Figure 6 shows the general construction of a conventional serial printer which includes a control unit 1 and a carriage portion 2 connected together via a connecting cord 3. The control unit 1 has a control portion 4 and a drive circuit 5. The control portion 4 is composed of a microprocessor, for example, and serves to control a space motor and a line feed motor (neither shown) as well as the drive circuit 5. The carriage portion 2 includes a print head 8 and a cooperating pair of head connectors 6,7 for connection of the print head 8, and is movable upon rotation of the space motor. The head connector 6 is disposed on a support plate (not shown) of the carriage portion 2 and is connected with the connecting cord 3. The head connector 7 is provided on the print head 8 and is adapted to be coupled with the head connector 6 for connecting the input side of the print head 8 through the connecting cord 3 to the output side of the drive circuit 5.

Figure 7 shows a schematic circuit diagram of a conventional matrix printer used for driving a print head 8a consisting of 24 pins or wires. In this figure, those component parts designated by reference characters 3a-8a correspond respectively to the component parts 3-8 shown in Figure 6 and the suffix "a" means that the respective component parts are so constructed as to meet the various requirements for driving a print head 8a consisting of 24 pins. The print head 8a includes a total of 24 driving coils (electromagnets) 801-824 each for selectively driving a corresponding one of the 24 pins arranged in two columns of 12 pins which correspond in position to two rows of 12 dots to be mutually printed. The control portion 4a delivers to the drive circuit 5a, two timing signals T_1, T_2 for determining the timing of the application of driving power to the respective columns of 12 pins, and drive signals D_1-D_{24} for driving the respective pins. The drive circuit 5a includes two PNP transistors 91,92 having emitters connected with the power supply and adapted to be turned on and off by the timing signals T_1, T_2 , and a total of 24 NPN transistors 101-124 having emitters connected to ground and adapted to be turned on and off by the drive signals D_1-D_{24} . The collectors of the transistors 91,92 are

connected successively through the connecting cord 3a and the head connectors 6a,7a with one end of the drive coils 801-812 and one end of the drive coils 813-824, respectively. The collectors of the transistors 101-124 are connected successively through the connecting cord 3a and the head connectors 6a,7a with the other end of the drive coils 801-824, respectively. Thus, each of the head connectors 6a,7a has at least 26 pins or terminals.

The operation of the printer thus constructed is described below.

When the level of timing signals T_1, T_2 delivered from the control portion 4a is low (L), the transistors 91,92 are turned on whereupon a drive voltage is supplied from the drive power supply to one end of the drive coils 801-812 and also to one end of the drive coils 813-824. When drive signals D_1-D_{24} delivered from the control portion 4a are high (H), the transistors 101-124 are turned on, whereupon the other end of the drive coils 801-824 becomes low (L). Consequently, an electric current flows through those drive coils to which the drive voltage is applied, thereby driving corresponding pins of the print head 8a. Thus, the 24 pins of the print head 8a are selectively driven depending on the level (H/L) of the timing signals T_1, T_2 and the drive signals D_1-D_{24} .

Figure 8 shows a schematic circuit diagram of another conventional printer used for driving a print head 8b consisting of 9 pins. In this figure, those component parts designated by reference characters 3b-8b correspond respectively to the component parts 3-8 shown in Figure 6 and the suffix "b" indicates that the respective component parts are so constructed to satisfy the requirements for driving a print head 8b consisting of 9 pins. The print head 8b includes a total of 9 drive coils 801-809 each for selectively driving a corresponding one of the 9 pins corresponding in position to a column or row of 9 dots to be mutually printed. The control portion 4b delivers to the drive circuit 5b a timing signal T_1 , and a total of 9 NPN transistors 101-109 having emitters connected to ground and adapted to be turned on and off in response to the drive signals D_1-D_9 . The collector of the transistor 91 is connected through the connector cord 3b and the head connectors 6b,7b with one end of the drive coils 801-809, the other end of the drive coils 801-809 being connected in common with collectors of the respective transistors 101-109.

The printer of the foregoing construction operates as follows:-

When a timing signal T_1 delivered from the control portion 4b is low (L), the transistor 91 is turned on whereupon the drive power supply applies a drive voltage to one end of the drive coils 801-809. In this instance, if drive signals D_1-D_9 are high (H), the transistors 101-109 turn on, thereby enabling an electric current to flow through the corresponding drive coils 801-809. Thus, the 9 pins of the print head 8b are selectively driven in dependence on the level (H/L) of the timing signal T_1 and the drive signals

D₁-D₉.

The conventional printers described above are not fully satisfactory for the following reasons:-

The printer incorporating the 24-pin print head 8a shown in Figure 7 is advantageous in that the print quality is high because the diameter of each individual pin is small and the printed character is composed of a large number of dots. On the other hand, this type of printer has the drawback that the print head 8a is heavy and hence gives an increased load on the space motor for driving the carriage portion. With this increased load, the printer is not suitable for high speed printing operations and consumes a considerable amount of electric power.

Conversely, the printer having the 9-pin print head 8b shown in Figure 8 is disadvantageous in that owing to the relatively large diameter of each individual pin and the small number of dots constituting the character, the print quality is low. The printer of this type is however lightweight and hence is suitable for high speed printing operations and consumes only a small amount of electric power.

Since high speed and high quality printing can be obtained only by an expensive and large-sized printer, it has been customary practice to appropriately use the 24-pin print head printer and the 9-pin print head printer with a view to the desired purpose, and considering the advantages of the respective printers. Such conventional practice is however tedious and time-consuming and requires two printers which are costly to maintain.

With the foregoing difficulties in view, the present invention seeks to provide a printer which is compact in size and inexpensive to maintain but is capable of loading various types of print head, thereby providing optimum printing for attaining the desired purposes.

According to the present invention, there is provided a printer comprising:

- (a) a print head for printing characters on a print paper and having connector means;
- (b) a carriage portion for loading thereon said print head;
- (c) a drive circuit for driving said print head;
- (d) a control portion for controlling said drive circuit on the basis of input information including print information;
- (e) identification means disposed on said print head for identifying the type of said print head;
- (f) connector means disposed on said carriage portion for enabling a plurality of different type of print heads to be connected commonly with said drive circuit and said control portion; and
- (g) said control portion being operative to identify the type of the print head currently loaded, on the basis of the content of said identification means, and also to perform said controlling of said drive circuit under certain controlling conditions corresponding to the type of the thus identified print head.

The printer thus includes identification means disposed on the print head for identifying the type of the print head currently loaded on a carriage portion

for printing characters on a print paper, connector means disposed on the carriage portion for enabling a plurality of different types of print head to be connected commonly with a driver circuit and a control portion. The control portion is operative to identify the type of the loaded print head on the basis of the content of the identification means, and also to perform control of the drive circuit under certain controlling conditions corresponding to the type of thus identified print head.

With the printer thus constructed, the control portion functions to identify the type of the print head connected with the connector means such as connector heads on the basis of the content of the identification means, and also to control the driver circuit under certain controlling conditions corresponding to the thus identified type of the print head. It is also possible to control the print speed by a space motor and the paper feed by a line feed motor in conformity with the type of the loaded print head. Accordingly, even with only one printer installed, it is possible to replace the existing print head with another head of an optimum type for the desired printing purposes. It is no longer necessary to selectively use various printers or to use an expensive and large-sized printer for meeting the user's desire. The printer is compact in size and inexpensive to manufacture and maintain. Because of the easiness of print-head replacement, the printer of the invention is applicable to various types of printing at the user's desire.

In order that the invention may be better understood, several embodiments thereof will now be described by way of example only and with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:-

Figure 1 is a schematic view showing the general construction of a printer embodying the present invention;

Figure 2 is a perspective view of the carriage portion of the printer shown in Figure 1;

Figure 3(a) is a schematic circuit diagram of a printer incorporating a print head consisting of 24 pins;

Figure 3(b) is a schematic circuit diagram of a printer incorporating a print head consisting of 9 pins;

Figure 4 is a flow chart illustrative of the operation of the printer;

Figure 5(a) is a perspective view of a print head according to a second embodiment;

Figure 5(b) is a schematic circuit diagram of a printer incorporating the print head shown in Figure 5(A);

Figure 6 is a schematic view showing the general construction of a conventional printer;

Figure 7 is a schematic circuit diagram of a conventional printer having a print head consisting of 24 pins; and

Figure 8 is a schematic circuit diagram of another conventional printer having a print head consisting of 9 pins.

Figure 1 shows the general construction of a printer embodying the present invention. In this figure, those component parts designated by reference numerals 11-18 correspond respectively to

the component parts 1-8 shown in and described above with reference to Figure 6. The print head 18 includes an identification means 20 for identifying the type of print head loaded or used in the printer. The identification signal representing the type of the loaded print head 18 is passed to the control portion 14 through a signal path or line 21 in the connecting cord 13. The control portion 14 is so constructed as to identify the type of the print head 18 loaded by virtue of the coupling engagement of the head connector 17 with the head connector 16, on the basis of the identification signal delivered from the identification means 20, and also to control the print head 18, a space motor and a line feed motor (neither shown) under certain controlling conditions suitable for the identified print head. Stated more specifically, the control portion 14 serves to control the operation of the print head 18 in such a way as to meet various driving conditions or requirements such as the number of print dots, print timing, drive period, drive waveshape, voltage, current and temperature. The space motor and the line feed motors are controlled by the control portion 14 to realise a print speed and a paper feed which are suitable for the identified print head.

A first embodiment of the present invention will be described in greater detail with reference to Figures 2, 3(a) and 3(b).

Figure 2 is a perspective view of the carriage portion 12. The print head 18 includes a head connector 17 in the shape of a rectangular plate or board projecting from the outer periphery of the head body. The head connector 17 is adapted to be fitted in a mating head connector 16 disposed on a support plate 12a of the carriage portion 12 for supporting the head connector 17. The support plate 12a has a circuit pattern by means of which the head connector 16 is connected in circuit with one end (mounting portion) of the connector cord 13 secured to the support plate 12, thereby enabling signal reciprocation with respect to the drive circuit 15 and the control portion 14. The head connectors 16, 17 have a common configuration and pin arrangement for enabling connection of a plurality of different types of print head. The connecting cord 13 is composed of a flexible printed board or a flat cable, thus enabling smooth movement of the carriage portion 12.

Figures 3(a) and 3(b) are schematic circuit diagrams of the printer according to the first embodiment, illustrative of the manner in which two different types of print head are commonly driven by a single circuit. The print head 18a shown in Figure 3(a) consists of 24 pins and is loaded on the carriage portion 12 by virtue of coupling engagement between the head connectors 16, 17. On the other hand, the pin head 18b shown in Figure 3(b) has 9 pins and is loaded on the carriage portion 12 by virtue of coupling engagement of the head connector 17 with the head connector 16. In this embodiment, the signal line 21 shown in Figure 1 is composed of three signal lines 211-213 extending between the control portion 14 and the head connector 16. The control portion 14 delivers a high level signal (H) and a low level signal (L) respectively through the signal lines

211, 212 to the head connector 16 and receives from the head connector 16 an identification signal through the signal line 213. The control portion 14 selectively supplies timing signals T₁, T₂ and driving signals D₁-D₂₄ to the drive circuit 15 on the basis of the identification signal. The drive circuit 15 is the same in construction as the driver circuit 5a shown in and described with reference to Figure 7. The output side of the drive circuit 15 is connected with the head connector 16. The 24-pin print head 18a is functionally the same as the print head 8a shown in Figure 7 and includes an identification means 20a (Figure 3(a)) for short-circuiting the signal lines 211 and 213 when the head connector 17 is coupled with the head connector 16. Consequently, the identification means 20a delivers a high level signal (H), as an identification signal, through the signal line 213 to the control portion 14.

On the other hand, the 9-pin print head 18b is functionally the same as the print head 8b shown in Figure 8 and includes an identification means 20b (Figure 3(b)) for short-circuiting the signal lines 212 and 213 when the head connector 17 is coupled with the head connector 16. Thus, the identification means 20b delivers a low level signal (L), as an identification signal, through the signal line 213 to the control portion 14. With this arrangement, the head connector 16 has at least 29 pins. The head connector 17 has the corresponding number of pins but when used with the print head 18a, it includes an empty or non-connected pin which corresponds in position to the signal line 212. Likewise, when used with the print head 18b, the head connector 17 has a total of 16 empty pins corresponding in position to 15 drive coils and the signal line 211.

The operation of the printer of the foregoing embodiment will be described below with reference to the flow chart shown in Figure 4.

For purposes of illustration, description is first applied to an instance where the 24-pin print head 18a is loaded as shown in Figure 3(a).

After a power-on reset or reset process, the control portion 14 reads the state value of the identification signal (appearing on the signal line 213) as being high (H) and identifies the loaded print head 18 as being a 24-pin print head 18a (Steps 1-3). Then, the control portion 14 proceeds with the setting of the operation mode, such as driving condition, print speed and paper feed which is suitable for the identified 24-pin print head 18a (Steps 4a and 5a). That is, the control portion 14 adjusts an internal timer to set the driving period and the print timing to predetermined values suitable for the 24-pin print head 18a, preparatory to the issuing of timing signals T₁, T₂ for driving the driver circuit and drive signals D₁-D₂₄ for driving the 24-pin print head 18a. At the same time, the control portion 14 also sets the drive mode of the space motor and the line feed motor for moving the drive head 18a at a suitable speed while feeding the print paper at a suitable rate.

Thereafter, a print demand signal is issued from an external controller (not shown) whereupon the control unit 14 chooses the print data relating to the 24-pin print head 18a stored in an internal memory.

and issues timing signals T_1, T_2 at the desired timing, and driving signals D_1-D_{24} corresponding to the print data, thereby selectively driving the 24 pins of the print head 18a for printing characters on the print paper (Steps 6a-8a). The printing operation is performed in the same manner as done in Figure 7.

Now, the description is applied to another instance where the 9-pin print head 18b is loaded on the printer as shown in Figure 3(b).

After the power-on reset or reset process, the control portion 14 reads the state value of the identification signal (appearing on the signal line 213) as being low (L) and identifies the loaded print head 18 as being a 9-pin print head 18b (Steps 1-3). Then, the control portion 14 proceeds with the setting of operation mode, such as driving condition, print speed and paper feed which is suitable for the identified 9-pin print head 18b (Steps 4b and 5b). Upon receipt of a print demand signal, the control unit 14 chooses the print data relating to the 9-pin print head 18b stored in the internal memory, and starts the printing operation (Steps 6b-8b). That is, the control portion 14 issues a timing signal T_1 at the desired timing and drive signals D_1-D_9 corresponding to the selected print data, thereby selectively driving the 9 pins of the head print head 18b. The printing operation is performed in the same manner as done in Figure 8.

In the first embodiment described above, two different types of print heads, namely the 24-pin print head 18a and the 9-pin print head 18b are loaded on the same printer. The present invention is however not limited to these two types but is also applicable to the loading of various printer heads in the light of the desired printing requirements. For example, in addition to the 24-pin print head 18a stated above, a print head with 18 pins arranged in zig-zag formation and a print head consisting of 36 pins are also available for high speed printing. The print quality is improved as the number of pins increases. However, the print speed is lowered with an increase in the number of dots constituting one character. Further, a printer having such a print head consumes an excess amount of power, is large in size and expensive to manufacture. On the other hand, high-speed printing is also performed by a 19-pin print head consisting of two columns of 9 pins. This 18-pin print head is operative at a print speed twice as large as the printing speed of the 9-pin print head 18b stated above. The print quality of 9-pin print head 18b.

It is therefore preferable to selectively use a high print-quality print head on occasions when high quality printing of characters such as Chinese characters is desired even at the sacrifice of low printing speed, or a high-speed print head when a high speed printing of characters such as alphabetical letters and numerals is desired even at the sacrifice of low print quality.

It is also possible to replace the print head in view of the type of print form or paper. For instance, a multi-layered form requires to be printed at a great impact force and hence a low-speed print head is suitable for such form. Conversely, a high-speed, low noise print head is suitable for the printing of a

single-layer form which requires only an average impact force.

The printer of the invention is also applicable to the printing of characters of various size, as it accepts loading of various print heads having different pin spacings or pitches. Furthermore, the printer also accepts loading of both a print head with upright pins and a print head with diagonal or slanted pins so that italic characters and upright characters can be printed either single or in combination.

In addition to the impact print heads stated above, a non-impact print head, such as a thermal head can be loaded on the printer of the invention when low noise printing is desired. The impact print heads are particularly suitable in application wherein high speed operation and/or the printing of multi-layered forms is a major requirement. As described above, the printer of the present invention enables loading of various types of print heads having respective applications. The number of the acceptable print heads is not limited to two, and a greater number of print heads are still possible when an identification means is used, as described later on. The types of the print head are determined by the specification of the printer. It is however necessary to preset the correlation between the types of acceptable print heads and the identification signals so that the control portion and the head connectors can accommodate themselves to such correlation.

In the first embodiment described above, the types of identifiable print heads are limited to two as the identification signal 213 has one bit information. However, the number of identifiable types of print heads is increased to 2^N when a corresponding number N of parallel identification signal lines are provided.

Figures 5(a) and 5(b) show a second embodiment of the invention which differs from the first embodiment in its identification system.

As shown in Figure 5(a), a print head 18c includes an identification means 20c composed of a parallel-serial (P/S) converter 201 (corresponding to a device available under the code number 74LS195A) for producing a predetermined identification signal.

As shown in Figure 5(b), the printer of this embodiment includes five signal lines 214-218. The control portion 14c supplies power (H) and the ground (L) respectively to a V_{CC} terminal and a GND terminal of the P/S converter 201 through the signal lines 214, 215. The control portion 14c also supplies a shift/load signal and a clock signal to a S/L terminal and a CLK terminal of the P/S converter 201 through the signal lines 216 and 217, respectively. The control portion 14c receives a serial identification signal from an output (Q_b) terminal of the P/S converter 201. To the input terminals A, D, J and K, and the clear (CLR) terminal, a high level signal (H) is given from the V_{CC} terminal. Likewise, the input terminals B and C of the P/S converter 201 receive a low level signal (L). With this arrangement, the P/S converter 201 has a preset input "1001" and hence issues a serial identification signal consisting of four bits of information "1001" from the Q_b terminal through the signal line 218 to the control portion 14c. The control portion 14c converts the serial identifica-

tion signal into parallel data through an internal serial-parallel converter, thus identifying the type of loaded print head 18c. In this second embodiment, 2⁴ types of print heads can be identified.

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Claims

1. a printer comprising:
 - (a) a print head (18; 18a; 18b; 18c) for printing characters on a print paper and having connector means (17);
 - (b) a carriage portion (12) for loading thereon said print head (18; 18a; 18b; 18c);
 - (c) a drive circuit (15) for driving said print head (18; 18a; 18b; 18c);
 - (d) a control portion (14; 14c) for controlling said drive circuit (15) on the basis of input information including print information;
 - (e) identification means (20; 20a; 20b; 20c) disposed on said print head (18; 18a; 18c) for identifying the type of said print head (18; 18a; 18b; 18c);
 - (f) connector means (16) disposed on said carriage portion (12) for enabling a plurality of different types of print head to be connected commonly with said drive circuit (15) and said control portion (14; 14c); and
 - (g) said control portion (14; 14c) being operative to identify the type of the print head currently loaded, on the basis of the content of said identification means (20; 20a; 20b; 20c), and also to perform said controlling of said drive circuit under certain controlling conditions corresponding to the type of the thus identified print head (18; 18a; 18b; 18c).
2. A printer according to claim 1, wherein said control portion (14; 14c) comprises a microprocessor, and wherein said identification means (20; 20a; 20b; 20c) includes a signal line (21; 213; 218) extending between said control portion (14; 14c) and said connector means (16; 17) for supplying to said control portion (14; 14c) an identification signal.
3. A printer according to claim 2, wherein said identification means (20; 20a; 20b) further includes at least two signal lines (211; 212) extending parallel to the first-named signal line (213) and co-operative therewith for producing said identification signal.
4. A printer according to claim 3, wherein said identification means (20a; 20b) includes pins disposed on said connecting means (16; 17) and short-circuiting the first-named signal line (213) and one of said two signal lines (211; 212).
5. A printer according to claim 2, wherein said identification means (20c) comprises a parallel-serial converter.

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FIG. 1

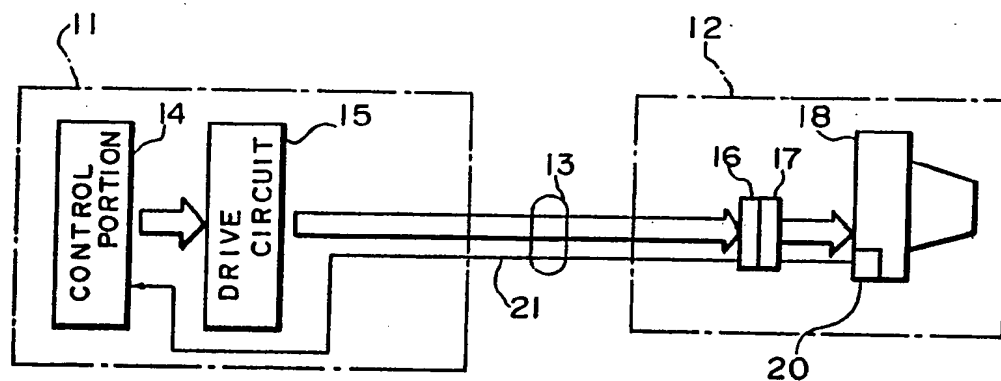


FIG. 2

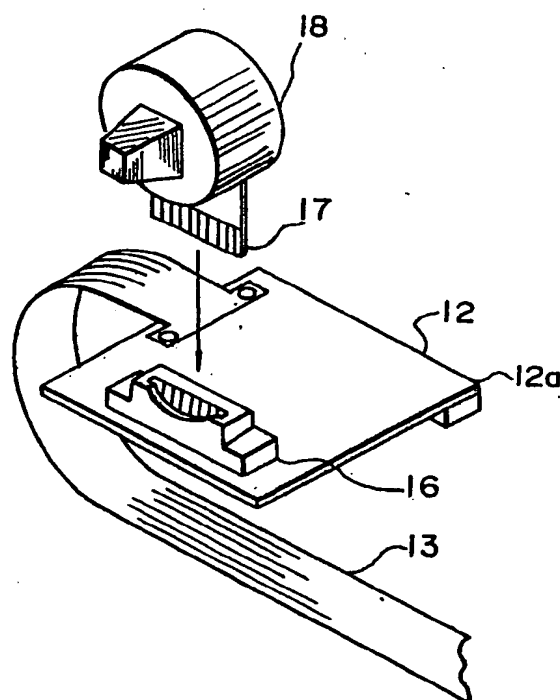


FIG. 3 (a)

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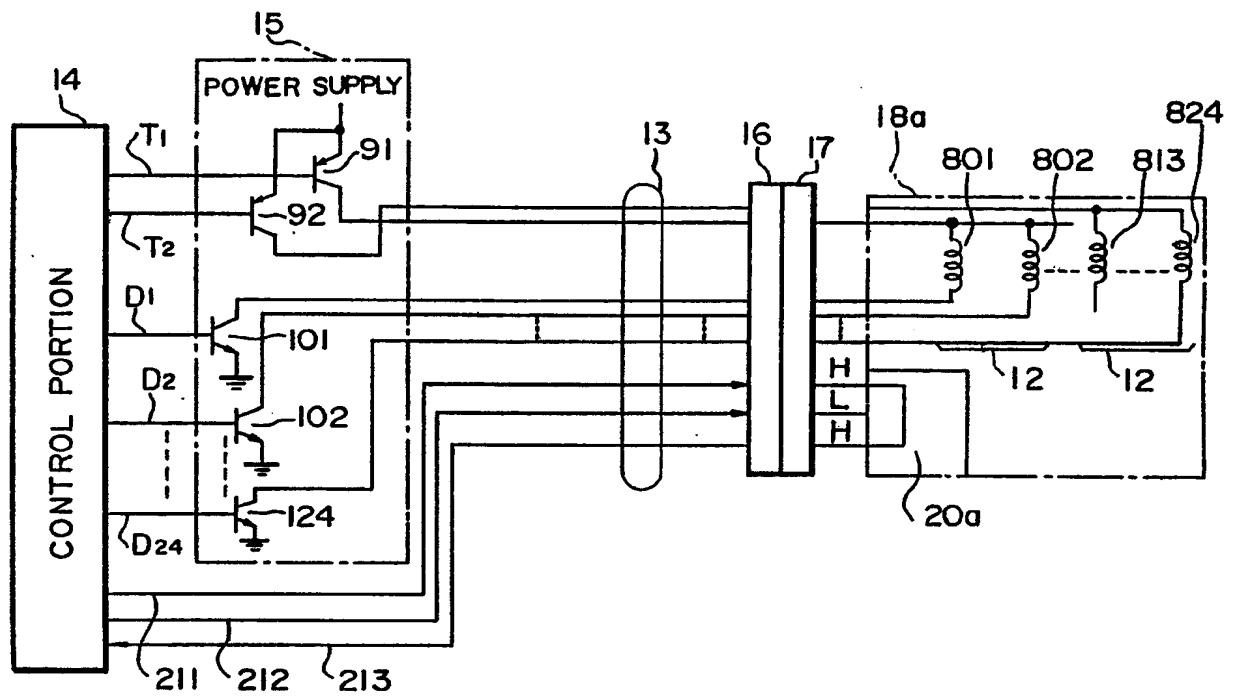


FIG. 3 (b)

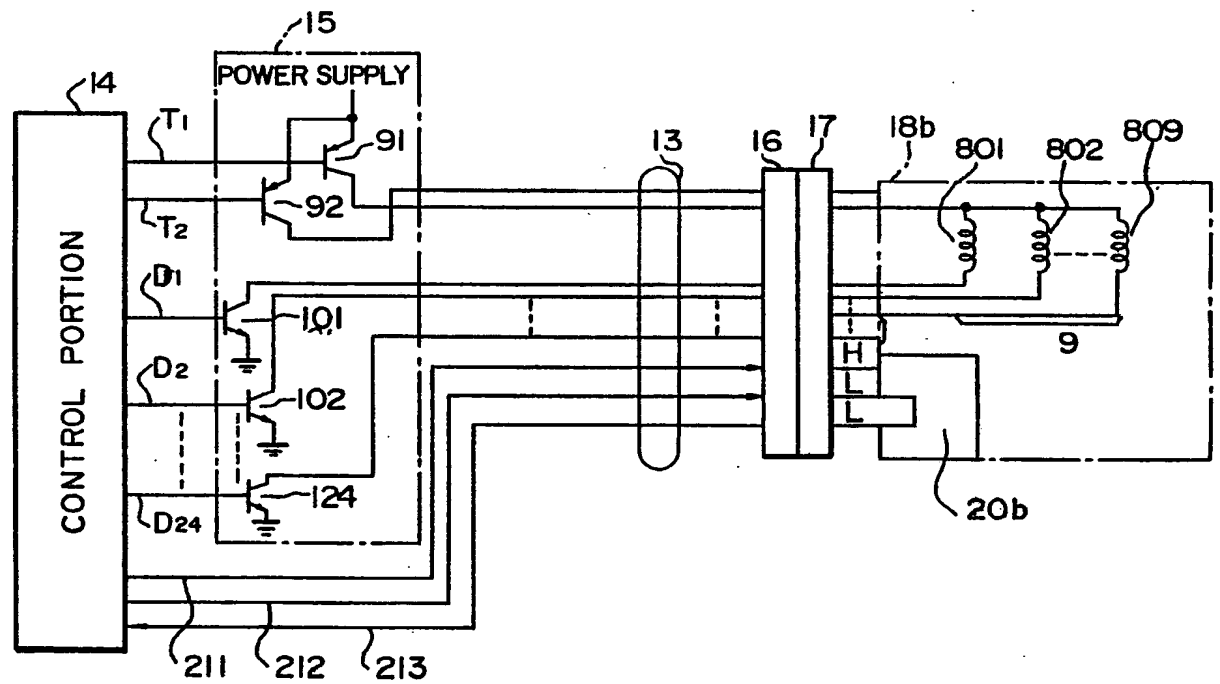


FIG. 4

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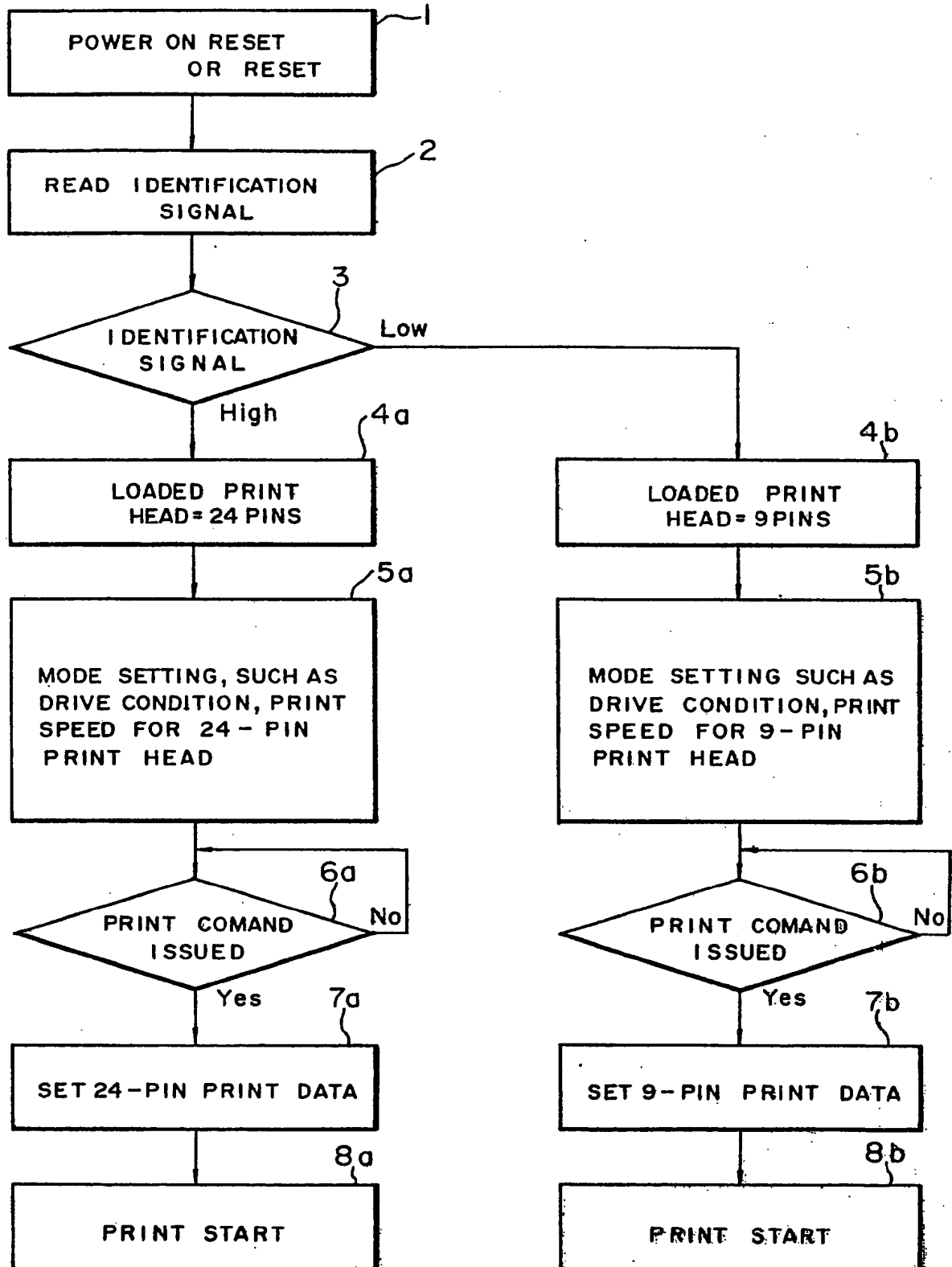


FIG. 5 (a)

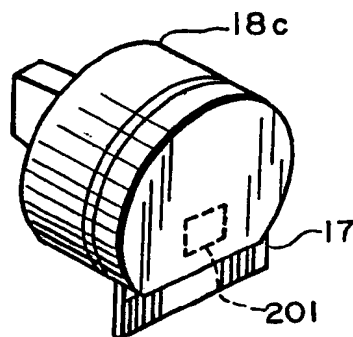
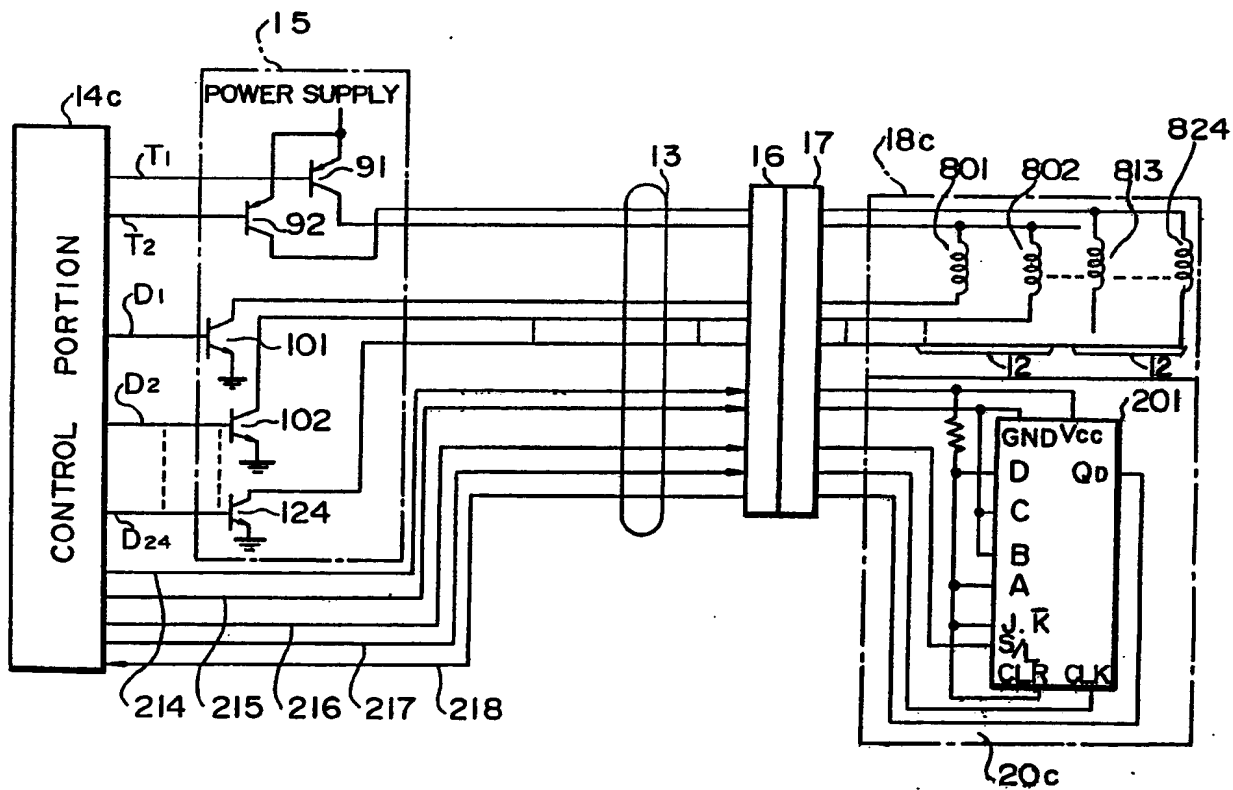


FIG. 5 (b)



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FIG. 6
(PRIOR ART)

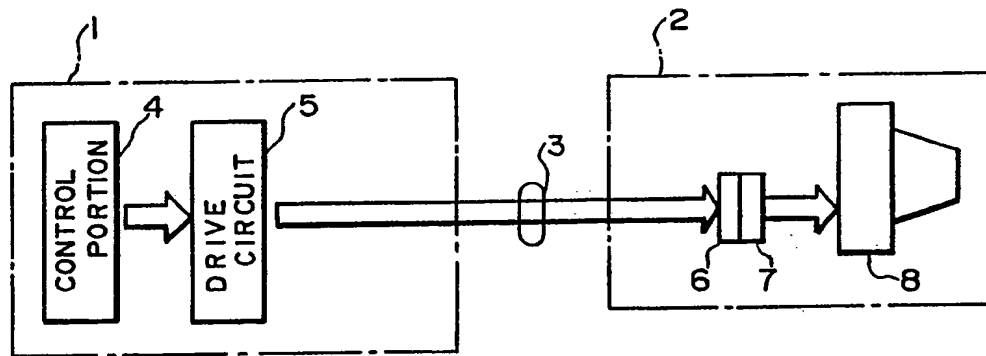


FIG. 7
(PRIOR ART)

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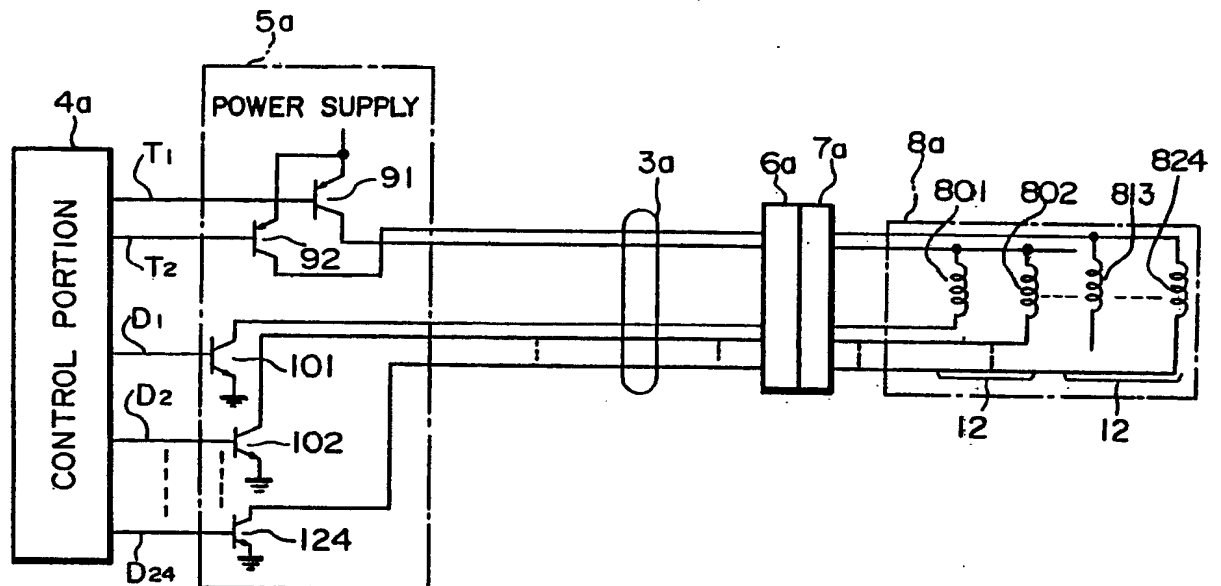
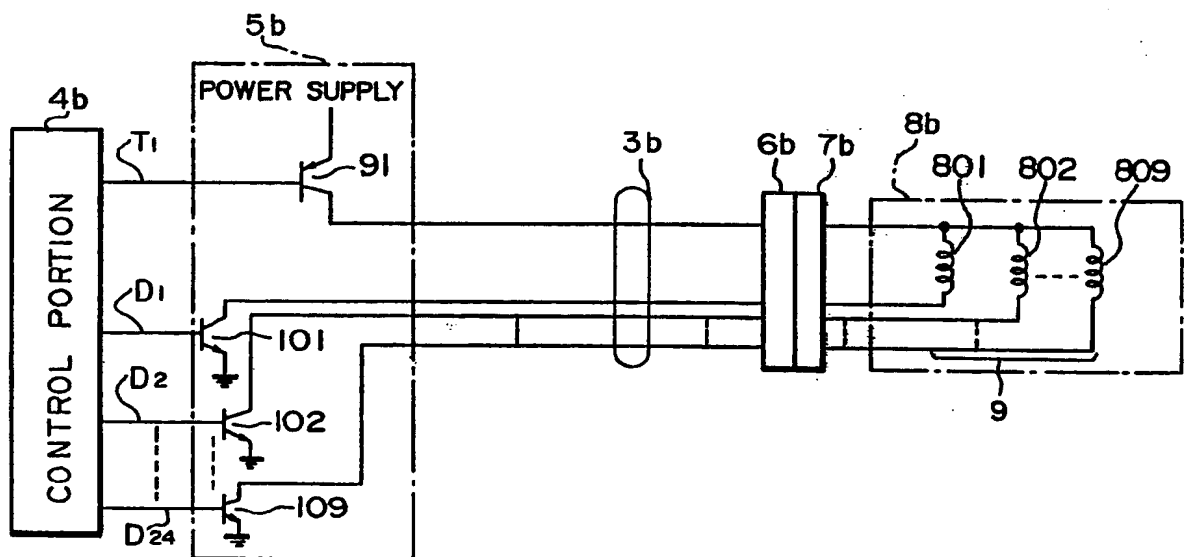


FIG. 8
(PRIOR ART)





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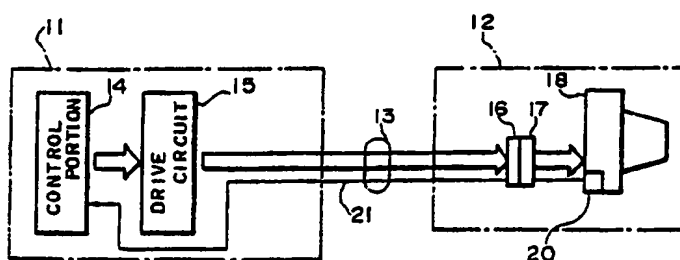
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54 Serial printer control.

57 A printer includes a print head (18) carrying identifications means (20) operable to identify the type of print head (18) currently loaded on a carriage portion (12) for printing characters on a print paper. Head connectors (16; 17) are disposed on the carriage portion (12) to enable a plurality of different types of print heads to be connected commonly with

a drive circuit (15) and a control portion (14). The control portion (14) is operative to identify the type of the currently loaded print head on the basis of the content of the identification means (20), and also to perform controlling of the drive circuit (15) under certain controlling conditions corresponding to the type of the thus-identified print head (18).

FIG. 1



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EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

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DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT			
Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int. Cl. 4)
A	<u>DE - B2 - 2 825 321</u> (INTERNAT. BUSINESS) * Columns 4,5; claims; fig. 1,2,4,5, *	1,2,5	B 41 J 3/02 B 41 J 3/10
A	<u>DE - A1 - 2 816 542</u> (OKI ELECTRIC) * Fig. 1,2; claims 1,3 *	1-3	
A	<u>GB - A - 1 57 865</u> (SEIKOSHA CO LTD.) * Abstract; claim 1; fig. 3 *	1,2	
A	<u>GB - A - 2 114 060</u> (DAVID JOHN) * Abstract; claims 1-4; fig. *	1,2	
A	<u>US - A - 4 114 750</u> (BAECK et al.) * Fig. 1; abstract; claims 1-9 *	1,2	
			TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int. Cl. 4)
			B 41 J G 06 K
The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search VIENNA		Date of completion of the search 29-11-1990	LANG Examiner
CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS			
X : particularly relevant if taken alone Y : particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category A : technological background O : non-written disclosure P : intermediate document		T : theory or principle underlying the invention E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date O : document cited in the application L : document cited for other reasons & : member of the same patent family, corresponding document	

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